

On the transformation of food knowledge in the context of socio-ecological transformation

*Workshop at the Centre for Global Cooperation Research,
University of Duisburg-Essen | May 5 & 6, 2026
Organization: Dominik Gerst*



Diagnoses of progressive climate change are motivating discussions on the issue of sustainable, socially and ecologically compatible diets. With the realization that Western food systems and cultures in particular are driving the climate crisis, attempts are being made to develop visions of alternative dietary practices and promote their implementation at various levels – from the everyday eating habits of individuals to local food communities and national and supranational food policies. The normatively framed transition process towards sustainable diets represents a comprehensive cultural change that goes hand in hand with a change in socially shared food knowledge, both in terms of its forms and content. The workshop invites participants to explore these changes in food knowledge. Three lines of inquiry are of particular interest here.

Firstly, it is important to explore which developments in contemporary society interact with a food-related transformation project. The first thing that comes to mind here is digitalization, which has given rise to phenomena such as vegan influencers and mediatized forms of digital food communities. However, the intensifying urban-rural divide, characteristics of an aging society, and growing economic inequalities can also be examined in terms of their contribution to (preventing the spread of) alternative food knowledge. In line with the self-image of a migration society, it is also important to discuss emerging intercultural hybridizations of nutritional knowledge. Finally, current social diagnoses of polarization in political communication or a widespread social experience of loss can be used to embed current conflicts surrounding dietary change.

Secondly, we can ask about concrete manifestations of change in food knowledge on various scales. This initially concerns practices of eating and food preparation, which are being transformed in response to calls for sustainability. Changes in shopping behavior and corresponding product innovations, which are being worked on in food labs, are also interesting. In addition, changes in food knowledge are also linked to the reconfiguration of physical taste experiences and taste-related identity and group constructions. From an institutional perspective, the formation of new or the transformation of existing nutritional institutions and the intra- and extra-organizational communications in which nutritional change is addressed are of particular interest. Finally, questions can be asked about the restructuring of food epistemes: for example, what new discursive connections are emerging at the intersection of sustainability, ecology, animal rights, and health discourses, and what changes in food knowledge are they bringing about?

Thirdly, the abundance of empirical phenomena of change provides an opportunity to address theoretical, conceptual, and methodological questions. What concepts can be used to understand praxeological reorientations, social innovations, institution building, and shifts in discourse? What understandings of food culture and knowledge can be used to grasp dietary change in particular? And, reformulated in methodological terms: How can changes in food knowledge be observed? What data and material should be the focus?

The workshop is intended as an open forum for discussion to address these and related questions, highlight connections between ongoing research activities, and explore future research perspectives.

Program

5.5.2026

- 1.30 pm Arrival and Coffee/Tea
- 2.00-2.30 pm **Dominik Gerst (Leipzig):** Introduction
- 2.30-3.30 pm **Inga Reimers (Regensburg):** Infrastructuring food – Insights into sustainable rural foodscapes in the making
- 3.30-3.50 pm Break
- 3.50-4.50 pm **Franka Schäfer (Siegen):** Let's share some food at Café Teilchen – Practice-Theoretical Insights into Socio-Ecological Everyday Practices in a Sociocratically Organized Living Lab
- 4.50-5.10 pm Break
- 5.10-6.10 pm **Rachel Reckinger (Luxemburg):** On the challenges of building political and societal traction around transformative food knowledge and collective agency through multi-stakeholder participation. Insights from 12 European cities' processes of establishing Food Policy Councils
- 7.00 pm Dinner

6.5.2026

- 9.00-10.00 am **Marcel Sebastian (Dortmund):** Working Class Veganism - outline of a research project
- 10.00-10.20 am Break
- 10.20-11.20 am **Martin Winter (Fulda):** Food and the socio-ecological gender conflict: Communitisation, Care and Masculinities
- 11.20-11.40 am Break
- 11.40-12.40 pm **Eva-Maria Endres (Berlin):** Eating Right, Eating Wrong: How Moral Narratives Shape Online Food Communities
- 12.40-2.00 pm Lunch
- 2.00-3.00 pm Wrap up